

NEWS

From the County of San Bernardino
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County on the lookout for store price-scanning errors

The weekend after Thanksgiving marks the official start of the holiday shopping season. Between parking, crowds, and searching for the perfect gifts it's easy for consumers not to notice whether they are being overcharged.

The holidays are challenging for retailers, too, and all too often sale prices, shelf prices, and the amounts charged at checkout don't match. Because of programming errors or poor procedures the prices charged by computerized scanning cash registers are sometimes higher and customers end up paying more than they should.

In California the law is clear – consumers are entitled to the lowest price offered by the retailer. The San Bernardino County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures is charged with enforcing this law by conducting accuracy inspections to make sure scanners are properly programmed.

"Protecting consumers is one of the many public services provided by the County of San Bernardino," said First District County Supervisor Bill Postmus. "The county's customers work hard for the money they spend during the holidays, so it's important for them to know that someone is looking out for them."

"Customers shouldn't have to worry about being overcharged during this busy time of year," added Second District County Supervisor Paul Biane. "However, mistakes happen. That's why it's good to know the county performs these inspections."

Last year, a statewide survey revealed that shoppers were overcharged on more than 2 percent of items. This happened most often in supermarkets and automotive and building supply stores. The County of San Bernardino offers the following shopping hints:

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Price-Scanning Errors

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- Check store receipts for accuracy. Were you charged the price you expected? Remember, the price must be the lowest price marked, posted or advertised by the store.
- Many stores offer a percentage discount off of some items. Stores sometimes neglect to make good on these offers, and catching them might require the shopper to perform some simple math. Fortunately, most percent reductions are in multiples of 10 percent. A 10 percent reduction is easy to figure by just moving the decimal point one place to the left. For example, a \$35 item with a 10 percent discount is reduced in price by \$3.50. For a 20 percent discount, just double the 10 percent amount. Subtract the amount from the regular price and you have the correct amount that should be charged.
- Don't be afraid to question store clerks about suspected errors. Contact the store manager or customer service desk if the cashier is unable to help.
- If the cash register display screen is visible, verify the prices being charged and point out any overcharges to the cashier. Ask about the store's policy on overcharges. Some stores will provide the item for free or offer a discount for discovering the overcharge.
- When buying an expensive item, ask the store if their policy entitles you to a refund of the difference if the item goes on sale within a reasonable amount of time.
- Ask about store return policies. They may have exceptions for sale and discontinued items.

Consumers who believe they were incorrectly charged and were not adequately assisted are urged to contact the San Bernardino County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures at 1-800-734-9459. If the price charged is incorrect when a Weights and Measures Officer investigates your complaint, the store can be fined and usually the customer is given a refund by the store for the amount of the price discrepancy.

NOTE: Reporters who are interested in accompanying an Agriculture/Weights and Measures inspector on a scanner inspection may contact department Director Ed Layaye at (909) 387-2115.